UNITED
NATIONS

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General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

A/54/173
S/1999/808
21 July 1999

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Fifty-fourth session
Item 43 of the provisional agenda*
THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fourth year

Letter dated 20 July 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to attach herewith a letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, David Levy, presenting the new Government of Israel's determination to advance the peace process. In expressing the hope for renewal in the diplomatic arena, Israel's Foreign Minister also addresses the need to rectify the anomaly of Israel's standing in the United Nations system.

I should be grateful if you would have the attached letter circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under item 43 of the provisional agenda, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Dore GOLD
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Letter dated 20 July 1999 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel addressed to the Secretary-General

As the new Israeli Government begins its term of office, I wish to emphasize this Government's determination, as well as my own conviction as Foreign Minister, to advance the Middle East peace process on all fronts. This is the most important mission facing Israel, and we see the achievement of a comprehensive peace as the key to prosperity for the countries and peoples of the region.

We face the challenge of shaping a new future for the peoples of the Middle East, who for many years have suffered from war and terrorism. It is my hope that in the very near future, we will witness the dawning of a new era of peace, security and life without threats or conflicts. The time has come for countries of the region to be able to revise their priorities and act to strengthen their respective economies and societies, without the shadow of threats and violence.

The negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as those between Israel, Syria and Lebanon, will not be easy. They will require a candid approach from the leaders of the region, and reciprocal concessions in complex and sensitive areas, related to a final status agreement and a determination of the permanent borders in the region. The lessons and experience gained to date in the peace process, which began at the 1991 Madrid Conference, as well as the achievements in this process until now, provide room for optimism.

In the coming months, the Government of Israel will move the negotiations forward. Prime Minister Barak has already met with a number of leaders in the region, and I am convinced that a basis will be created for the mutual trust that is so essential to progress.

On a practical level, our intention is to accelerate the diplomatic activities, through focusing on the implementation of the Wye agreement, the renewing of the final status negotiations with the Palestinians and the advancement of negotiations between Israel, Syria and Lebanon. We will be restarting the multilateral process, in which we will concentrate on regional aspects essential to the future of the peoples of the region. These issues include economy, water, environment, refugees and regional security.

We intend to carry out these negotiations in good faith, with the belief and confidence that we can achieve peace agreements with all our neighbours. We expect our peace partners to act in a similar way. It is true that one has to avoid building up exaggerated expectations, and this applies all the more when the gaps between the sides are still great. Nevertheless, a historic opportunity lies before us and we must take advantage of it. The burden of difficult decisions will fall upon the parties themselves. Nevertheless, we trust that the regional and international systems will respond and provide assistance and support for this political effort to achieve peace, and will help the parties overcome their mutual fears and anxieties.

Peace and security go hand in hand. There can be no progress in the peace process against a background of terrorism and hostile political activity, serving only to heighten mistrust. Peace agreements must provide security for all peoples of the region, thereby leading to the establishment of a stable, wide-ranging network of ties. Progress in the peace process will not be possible without the backing and support of public opinion and the societies at large. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to strengthen the confidence of the peoples of the region in the ideals of normalcy and coexistence, in an atmosphere of friendship and cooperation.

It is also our hope that in the months ahead, we can finally complete the normalization of Israel's involvement in the United Nations system. As you well know, Israel's exclusion from any regional group has deprived it of its right to be an equal participant in the United Nations system. It has, inter alia, prevented Israel from serving in the main United Nations organs, including the Security Council. It is our hope that you will continue to support Israel in correcting this anomaly.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you my hope that we are indeed witnessing the dawning of a new era in the Middle East, in which we will be able to announce the arrival of a comprehensive peace: there will be an end to wars, an end to violence and an end to terrorism, and the region will become a centre of regional and international development and cooperation.

(Signed) David LEVY
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Government of Israel